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Television: Tales From the Inquisition

In 1998, the Vatican announced it would open its Inquisition archives to scholars for the first time. Now a documentary filmmaker has spun that and other caches of documents around Europe into a four-episode, \$3 million docudrama.

"**Secret Files of the Inquisition**," which debuts Wednesday on PBS (9 p.m. EDT; check local listings), narrates the stories of inquisitors and the subjects of their investigations in their own words. Based on documents from France, Spain, Italy and the Vatican, the film flips between interviews with scholars and large-scale reenactments, including those of a 14th-century French noblewoman who was imprisoned and a Franciscan friar who taught Protestant ideas -- and spent 14 years in solitary confinement.

The series received kind reviews after its premiere last year in Canada and the U.K. But it has also attracted some controversy, in part because Joseph Di Noia, undersecretary for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican's successor to the Inquisition, says in the first episode that torture is a "mistake," but adds that it was "legally justified" at the time. The Congregation declined to comment on the content of the series.



A scene from 'Secret Files of the Inquisition'